

MAIN POINT

The intentional involvement of individual Christians coming together to help other Christians grow in their relationship with Jesus has a far greater impact than the programs of the Church in making disciples, but the local church still has a major part to play in this process.

INTRODUCTION

Quiz

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the country.
2. Name five people who have won a Nobel prize.
3. Name five recent sermon series from pastor Randy.
4. Name five people who have helped you grow in your walk with Christ.

What lessons can we learn from this quiz?

The people who make the biggest impact in our lives are not necessarily famous. They are everyday people who care most about us and demonstrate their love for us.¹

And there is another lesson. You may have done better on question #3 than on questions #1 and #2, but it's also likely you did best on question #4. The individual people who invested most in our walk with Christ tend to come to memory faster and likely have had a greater impact on our life.

Note to study leader: Today we transition from talking about being a disciple to talking about being a disciple-maker. Today's lesson will specifically consider the roles of both individual Christians and the church as a whole in the process of making disciples.

First, let's review our definition of a disciple at The Heights: "A disciple is someone who is growing in their relationship with Jesus and helping others to do the same."

It is common for a church culture to view the job of making disciples as primarily being the job of the organization of the church. The church develops programs (Sunday School, Bible studies, outreach events, mission trips, community groups, etc.) that help us in our walk with Christ. But in the midst of all of these activities, we must not lose sight of our primary mission, to make disciples.

"Go make disciples is the task we've been left here to do.... I'm talking about us all—individually and together—being very intentional about making disciples." Pastor Randy Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, June 9th, 2024

UNDERSTANDING

THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE IN MAKING DISCIPLES

THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

You have probably heard of the question asked, "What would you rather receive, \$1,000 a day every day for a month, or start on day 1 by receiving a penny, and doubling the amount you receive for each day of the month? It turns out option 1 would give you a total of \$30,000, while option 2 would give you \$5,368,709 on the 30th day alone, not to mention all of the money from the previous days.

¹Bobby Harrington and Josh Robert Patrick, *"The Disciple Maker's Handbook: Seven elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017)

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:2

What does Paul tell Timothy to be doing in this verse?

Pass on what Paul has taught him in the presence of many witnesses to other specific people.

With what kinds of people is Timothy told to carry out the process of disciple making?

Reliable men, who will also be qualified to teach others.

What kinds of qualities should you be looking for in the people you disciple?

The Greek word translated as “reliable” is defined showing one’s self faithful in the transaction of business or the discharge of official duties, or someone who can be relied on. They are also to be able to teach others. So, we need to be selective about who we invest our lives in in the disciple-making process. If someone is too busy to meet regularly with you, or is incapable of passing this on, or is not fully committed to growing in Christ, they would not be good candidates to disciples. It has been said, “Don’t invest your live in barnacles.” Think of a barnacle attached to the bow of a ship. We want to invest our lives in people who aren’t just along for the ride in the church as we get involved in disciple-making.

What might we learn from the fact that as Paul was discipling Timothy, they were in the presence of many witnesses?

We need to be selective about who we disciple, since we need to be investing our lives into those who will be qualified to keep the process of making disciples going. At the same time, we are not to neglect the many other important ministries of the church. Taking care of widows and orphans (people who can’t take care of themselves) is mentioned repeatedly in the Bible as something of high importance. While making disciples, we need to continue serving the entire church.

How does this relate to the example of \$1,000 a day versus doubling a penny for 30 days?

In the long run, it will be way more effective to train another Christian to be able to train another Christian, doubling your efforts with each new generation of disciples. Paul trained Timothy, and now as Paul continues training others, Timothy is doing the same. This process may start out slowly (think of Jesus spending three years with twelve men), but as we keep doubling our efforts, fruit should begin to multiply.

How did Jesus initiate this principle while he was on earth?

He taught large groups of people—sometimes thousands at a time—but spent most of his time investing in twelve men, knowing one would be lost (Judas). And after Pentecost, these 11 men went out first into Israel, and then into the entire Roman world, making disciples of all nations. It was these eleven men, plus the Apostle Paul (who after his conversion was supernaturally discipled by Jesus for three years-see Galatians 1:15-19)) who had a much bigger impact on the world than the thousands of other people Jesus had taught.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH BODY IN MAKING DISCIPLES

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6

What does this passage have to say about the source of our Christian unity?

The sevenfold repetition of “one” in these verses is striking. The unity of the body of Christ reflects the perfect oneness within the Trinity. This same unity should permeate the Christian community.

Paul is preparing to discuss the fact that God has given us different gifts as individual believers. Why do you think he chose to start this discussion with a reminder about our unity in Christ?

God gives different spiritual gifts to each of us as Christians, to equip the church. So, we all need each other in the church to carry out our primary function of making disciples. As can be seen from the church at Corinth, we as sinful people can fall into the trap of comparing, division, pride, boasting, envy, and jealousy.

“Jesus prays (in John 17) for a unity that gives the world a chance to see:

- 1. The unity between the Father and the Son*
- 2. Our unity will be evidence that the Father sent Jesus and that He loves them.*
- 3. Our unity points to objective truth.”*

(Pastor Randy Hahn’s sermon notes from March 17, 2024, entitled, “Jesus’ Prayer for Us”)

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 4:11-16

This group of verses can be broken into three sub-passages. What environment should the church create to provide a great place for making disciples as described in each of these sub-passages?

Verses 11-13: Christ has given each of us different roles and spiritual gifts, to equip each of us for works of service, so that collectively the body of Christ may be built up. We need each other!

Verse 14: We are to serve each other until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming mature.

Verses 15-16: We are to grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head of the church.

What’s the purpose of God giving different spiritual gifts within Christian community? Why is it essential to the mission?

In these verses, Paul lists some of the different spiritual gifts Christ gives His followers. Paul also makes it clear that the purpose of these gifts is for building up the body of Christ. We NEED each other as Christians. None of us can be a lone ranger in carrying out the great commission Christ gave to the church.

How do the instructions given in this chapter of Ephesians relate to our role as individual disciple-makers and our role as a church body in making disciples?

As disciples of Christ, we are responsible for making disciples. This includes the following:

- Building up the Body of Christ
- Growing in the Unity of the faith
- Growing in the knowledge of Jesus
- Growing in maturity
- Not being tossed by the waves of false doctrine
- Speak truth in the context of love
- Remembering the goal is to ensure all of us in the church are growing in our relationship with Christ.

APPLICATION

As we continue to look at being disciple makers in the church over the next several weeks, continue to consider the role God would have me take on in this process.

How can I use the gifts God has given me to serve the church and help fulfill the great commission?

PRAYER

Pray that as disciples of Christ, we would grow in our walk with Him through God’s grace. Pray that we would take Christ’s great commission seriously, and that over the next several weeks, God would reveal to us how we are to become more involved in the process of making disciples at The Heights.

COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

4:1 The word therefore is the pivot word for the entire epistle. Paul was saying, “On the basis of everything I have written so far, certain results should follow.” The verb walk reminds us that holy living is a daily process. The term worthy shows us that we aim toward a high standard.

4:2 Four attitudes are essential to the Christian’s worthy walk—humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Humility is the lowliness of mind that sees other people as valuable. Gentleness refers to strength under control. Patience means slowness to avenge a wrong or to retaliate when hurt by another. Love is the famous Greek noun *agape*, the John 3:16 kind of sacrificial concern for others that sent Jesus willingly to the cross.

4:3 The unity of the spirit already exists. It was brought about historically by Christ’s cross. We experience it by God’s Spirit. Thus we do not have to manufacture unity; rather we are to work at diligently keeping it. This happens as we focus our energy on expressing the peace that binds us to God and to one another (Col. 3:15). Christians are not called to create spiritual unity but rather to demonstrate it through relational unity.

4:4-6 The sevenfold repetition of “one” in these verses is striking. The bottom line is that Christian unity (one body, one hope, one faith, and one baptism) arises out of the Trinitarian unity of God (one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father—listed in the reverse of our usual order).

4:7 The grace of God saved us (2:8). Furthermore, He continues to work in each one of us believers, enabling the worthy walk. Our unity is not the same as uniformity. Diversity is expressed by the great variety of spiritual gifts that the risen Lord has given. The measure of the Messiah’s gift means that He has distributed spiritual gifts to believers according to His plan, not according to our wishes.

4:8 Paul quoted Psalm 68:18 as the biblical precedent to explain the Lord’s giving gifts to His people. This psalm celebrated a great military victory in which David praised God as the true King who had led Israel to victory. In ancient times, victorious kings often ascended to their throne with great pomp and with bound war captives following them (He took prisoners into captivity). These kings also received the spoils of war and distributed them to their own people (He gave gifts to people). In Paul’s thinking, this was comparable to what Jesus did in His victory over death.

4:9 In His exaltation, the Lord Jesus is like an ancient king who had led his people to victory. The words He ascended point to Jesus’ ascension after His victorious resurrection (Luke 24:51). In Paul’s teaching, Jesus’ ascent (from earth to heaven) necessarily implied a previous descent (from heaven to earth). Thus the words He descended to the lower parts of the earth most likely refer to His incarnation, when God’s Son humbled Himself and took on humanity.

4:10 Paul was more interested in highlighting Christ’s ascent than His descent. His victorious ascent is greater than that of any mere earthly king, for He ascended far above all the heavens. He has taken His position at the Father’s right hand (Heb. 1:1-3). Furthermore, there is no place in the universe from which He is excluded, for He fills all things.

4:11 Our exalted Lord has distributed gifts as He wishes. Although each believer has at least one spiritual gift, Paul focused on the gifted leaders Jesus personally gave so that congregations will grow. Apostles refers to those Christ personally commissioned. Prophets spoke messages inspired by God (3:5). Evangelists can make the gospel especially clear and relevant to unbelievers. Every Christian is called on to be a witness for Christ, but some are especially capable in this area. Pastors and teachers provide leadership for local congregations.

4:12 To what end has the Lord given congregations gifted leaders? The goal is that they will train the saints in the work of the ministry. It’s not that the leaders do all the ministry; rather the ministry is to be done by all believers working together.

4:13 In 4:3 Paul had urged believers to be “diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit.” Now the term unity occurs as one goal toward which believers (with diverse gifts) are working together. This unity is both doctrinal (in the faith) and relational (in the knowledge of God’s son).

4:14 Paul noted two illustrations of what happens when believers work together. The first is drawn from human development. Individual believers grow from infancy (little children) to adulthood (“a mature man,” 4:13). The second illustration is from sea life. Believers who work together will not be like a storm-tossed boat, upset by the waves and blown around by every wind. To be sure, there will always be false teaching to confront. There will be human cunning with cleverness. There will be techniques of deceit trying to lead believers astray. But Christians who have worked together to develop a clear understanding of the faith and who know Christ intimately will survive such attacks.

4:15 The cure for immaturity and instability is speaking the truth. Yet this truth is to be expressed in love—with compassion and understanding. Truth without love can be cold and harsh; love without truth can be mushy and weak.

4:16 Paul returned to the illustration of human development, but with a twist. This time he thought of a single body (rather than of many little children). It has a Head (Jesus Christ; see 4:15 and 5:23), who directs all the operations (from Him). At the same time, the body (the local congregation) has many parts that need to work together. An individual church member is a supporting ligament or an individual part (see also 1 Cor. 12:14-21). Each part has been fitted and knit together by the Lord with all the other parts. With the proper working of each part, the body will do what it’s supposed to do.